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FIRST INTERVIEW WITH MINORU MATSUDA

April 2, 1992. Mr. Matsuda lives in Sebastopol at 896 Matsuda Lane off Sparkes Road. Interviewer Arlene Houghton, 734 Litchfield Avenue, Sebastopol, Phone: 823-8179.

A: Can you tell me your whole name, please?

MM: My name is Minoru Matsuda, 896 Matsuda Lane. Born January 7, 1915.

A: Your place of birth?

MM: I was born on a ranch out in Windsor.

A: When did you move here?

MM: We moved here in 1936, so that was about 56 years ago.

A: Were you married at that time?

MM: No, I wasn't. I just got out of school.

A: So you didn't go to school here then?

MM: Yes, I did. I graduated from Analy in 1934.

A: And your occupation while you were here?

MM: Then I was raising apples and we also had an apple dryer.

A: Your family had one?

M: Yes.

A: So you were part of the apple industry here. Do you know anything about your parents' names and place of birth?

MM: Yes, my father's name was Taichi Matsuda and my mother's name was Tsune Matsuda. They were both born in Japan.

A: Do you know when they came here?

MM: My father came over around 1909 or 1910 and my mother came in 1914.

A: Just before you were born?

MM: Yes.

A: Did she come over to marry your father?

MM: They were married in Japan.

A: Do you have other brothers and sisters?

MM: I had one brother. He passed away about 1946, about 45 years ago. My mother is now 94 and so she is still living. (She has passed away as of the transcription of this tape). But she is in bed most of the time now.

A: And you had children too?

MM: Yes, I had three boys. They are 36, 35 and 32.

A: O.K. Maybe we can get into a little bit of history of the Enmanji Temple and then we can come back to some of your personal history. Do you know how the Japanese people came to be here in Sebastopol and how long ago? Do you know anything about the history of the community?

MM: I think they first came here about 1909 or 1910. They came as laborers. They worked in the hop yards and orchards and pruning trees in the winter time and I think that's about all. Mostly laboring work.

A: So that's what your father did?

MM: Yes.

A: Did he have his own ranch too?

MM: Well, no he didn't have any. They came with very little money. In fact, only what they could carry on their backs, so they practically started rather new.

A: Were they only allowed to carry what they had on their backs?

MM: No, that's all they had.

A: So they came around 1910. Other Japanese people seemed to come around the same time too.

MM: Yes, and later too.

A: Did your father know anybody when he came here originally?

MM: I don't think so. He just happened to come here. He came through Hawaii and worked there for about a year and then he came here.

A: Did he tell you anything about working in Hawaii?

MM: Not very much.

A: Did he say how he liked it?

MM: I think he worked in the sugar plantation at that time.

A: I wanted to get some religious information. Can you tell me a little about Buddhism. The Enmanji Temple is Buddhist, isn't it?

MM: Yes, Jodo Shinshu Buddhist.

A: And what are some of the beliefs? Can anybody go?

MM: Yes, they have services every Sunday and everyone is invited to attend. The religion itself, I guess they teach the truth for life for what it is.

A: How would it be different from CHristianity. My understanding of Christianity is that there is not very much cherishing of the earth and natural world. It's almost like in Christianity, Christians are supposed to be lords and masters over other animals and the earth. I understand that is not so in Buddhism?

MM: No, it isn't. WE don't have such a thing as God in our religion. We have Buddha. But that stands for the truth and it's the true teaching. We don't believe in idols. Buddha is not an idol.

A: Is it more a sense of harmony between yourself and the earth?

MM: Yes, there is.

A: How are the church services held?

MM: Our minister speaks. His name is Reverend Shiro Nishii. And he speaks English the first part of the service and he speaks Japanese the second part.

A: About the temple. I have heard very briefly that it was brought here piece by piece.

MM: Yes, there was an exhibit by the Manchurian Railway in 1933 at the Chicago World's Fair and after the fair it was dismantled and brought over to Sebastopol.

A: By railway?

MM: Yes, by railway.

A: So the people in the community, did they save the money up for the temple and have it shipped (here)?

MM: Yes.

A: And then who assembled it when it got here?

MM: I think they had one or two carpenters from Japan and then the people from around here volunteered to help them put it up.

A: So a lot of people from the community helped to put it up as well as saved money for it?

A: Do you know who originally built it back in Chicago?

MM: No, I don't.

A: Was it built by Japanese people?

MM: I think it was, yes. It was brought over from Manchuria. And then they assembled it there.

A: Did anybody else in the community mind that it was brought here? Nowadays, if you build anything it has to look exactly like the rest of the town.

MM: No, I don't think they had that situation then.

A: So nobody objected to it. So it was always a part of the community right from the beginning. Can you tell me about some of the festivals or anything that are held there at the Temple?

MM: Yes, we have three main services a year. The first one is in April. It's the birthday of Shakamuni Buddha.

A: Can you describe what that is like?

MM: Yes, you have a shrine, a flower shrine in the front. We decorate it with all flowers and we have a statue of Buddha too. And it's in a small pond. It's sweet tea. It is said that when Buddha was born, rain fell from the heavens and we are allowed to get a dipper of that sweet tea and pour it on the statue when we go up to Osho Ko - which means to put your hands together and bow down. And then the next one is in July called Obon. It's the celebration to show the gratitude of our ancestors who have passed away. That's when we have the Obon dance in the summertime. That's held in the evening from about 7-10 p.m. and everyone is welcome. It's publicized. It's about a week or so after the barbecue. And the third one. (He couldn't think of this one - but will relate it later)

A: As far as the birthday of Shakimuni Buddha, so you know what the significance of the flowers on the shrine are? Because it's Spring?

MM: In Buddha you have a lot of lotus flowers and the lotus come out of a dirty pond. It shows that even in dirty water, a beautiful flower like the lotus can come out of it.

A: If you can think of anything else like this to share with me, please do so at any time. Are there quite a few Japanese people living in the area around here, do you know?

MM: I guess right now there must be about 40-50 families around Sebastopol.

A: Are these the people who attend the weekly?...

MM: No, not too many attend. That's the trouble we have. MOst of them are members. Of course, some of them are different religions too. But we have about 30-40(who come)to our services right now.

A: Do you have people who come from outside Sebastopol also?

MM: Yes, we have people from Petaluma. We have mostly Petaluma people and some from Santa Rosa and Sebastopol.

A: So is this the only temple around?

MM: In Sonoma County.

A: Can you think of anything else about the temple that you would like to share with us? Are several people the care-takers, or do people take turns (taking care of the temple)?

MM: Every month, we have a committee that is supposed to take care of the grounds and the garden and all that.

A: So if I wanted to go down and take pictures of it, who would I get in touch with?

MM: You can ask our minister, he lives right there.

A: What was the original purpose for building the temple here? Was it mostly religious? Or was it for community type things. It sounds like it was mostly religious?

MM: Yes.

A: It sounds like you have been around Sebastopol a long time too...

MM: Yes, I've been here all my life.

A: Would you like to share some things about Sebastopol. Do you remember anything about the Depression?

MM: Yes, I remember the camps. My father used to run an orchard next door to Handy's Camp. HE had ten acres there. I think he must have run that place about 7-8 years altogether and they had some nice trees in those days, but now I notice they are mostly all gone.

A: So you remember when people were living at Handy's?

MM: Yes, I do, during the Depression and before too.

A: Were there a lot of people living there then?

MM: Yes, there was quite a camp there.

A: Were they mostly men?

MM: I think they were families.

A: So when people talk about the homeless today, it sounds like there were even more then?

MM: I guess they weren't considered homeless.

A: Were they in tents?

MM: Yes, tents.

A: So were they transient people, or were they considered "down on their luck"?

MM: Yes, I guess you would call it. In Pellini's Camp also. They used to have many tents in there. But I guess people got to have more money, so they began to have trailers and things like that. Not too many people live in tents now. I guess our standards came up a little bit.

A: How did people consider them? Some people today don't think very well about the homeless. It sounds like it wasn't like that.

MM: No, I guess it was a little different in those days.

A: Did people understand more do you think?

MM: Yes, I think so, yes.

A: So how did the Depression affect your family?

M: Oh, my father and my mother had a hard time too, feeding us. But we managed to get by. In those days we never had welfare or anything like that, so we all had to work pretty hard to keep up. Like us, after school, we had to come home and change clothes and help out doing the work.

A: So you didn't have any time to get into trouble?

MM: Yes, in a way I guess it was good.

A: So how about the Second World War?

MM: In the Second World War, we had to go to camp. We got evacuated from this coast area.

A: The whole family? This was before you were married?

MM: Yes.

A: Where did you go to?

MM: Well, we went through Merced. They had a fairground over there in Merced and they had temporary barracks built there and there were about 4,000 people during that time.

A: How did your father and mother feel about that?

MM: Well, they were pretty sad but there wasn't much we could do about it. We had to just stay together.

A: So your family was never separated?

MM: No, we weren't. We were all together.

A: Had they owned anything before they were put in the camps? Because I understand that people had their property taken away from them.

MM: We had this property when we left. We had this place here. This place had only that barn and a tank house. We built this house after we came back.

A: So the property wasn't taken?

MM: No, it wasn't. Now we had another place down by Bloomfield Road and Gravenstein Highway, down by Frank's Corner. We had two acres there. (That was his father's).

A: But I had understood that property was taken away.

MM: No, it wasn't taken away. As long as you were able to make payments.

A: How were you able to do that?

MM: WEll, we had this place rented out. And the other place also. We didn't get very much.

A: So how old were you then?

MM: I was 27 when the war started.

A: And your brother died after the war?

MM: Yes, my brother passed away after the war. He got sick right after we came back. While we were building that other house.

A: Do you think that it had anything to do with being away in the camps that he got sick?

MM: Yes, in a way I guess he should have taken better care of himself, but he neglected to do so.

A: Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about that time? How did other people in the community feel about this forced evacuation? How did other people respond to that?

MM: We kind of all stuck together.

A: How about non-Japanese people in the community? Did you

feel fear or support?

MM: They treated us pretty well. Maybe they didn't feel that within themselves, but they didn't show it. They were all supportive to us. WE knew a lot of people for a long time, so they were pretty good to us. In war time everybody gets all excited and do things they wouldn't ordinarily do.

A: So you went to Analy High School? Did you go to it when it was a wooden building also?

M: Yes.

A: What were your memories of Analy High School? You must have graduated outdoors under those trees also?

MM: Yes, we did. We had an outdoor graduation.

A: Did you have dances back then and proms?

MM: They did, I think, but I didn't go to it. The old building, they condemned it. I think it was in my senior year.

A: So you may have been one of the last years to graduate from there (the old building) then?

MM: I think so, yes. The building they have now was built in 1937 so I went to night school lots over there, taking farm shop and welding and things like that. And my wife went to English classes for three years over there when she got her citizenship.

A: So your wife was born in Japan?

MM: Yes.

A: How did you meet?

MM: I took a trip to Japan and we met over there.

A: After the war?

MM: Yes.

A: Were you thinking about staying over there?

MM: No, I didn't. I wanted to come back again.

A: So you went over to find a wife?

MM: Yes, (smile)

A: What year did you get married?

MM: May of 1954.

A: And so this country was all new to her.

MM: Yes.

A: And what did she think of this country?

MM: She liked it over here. Over there in those days everything was scarce, see. And during wartime, they had a hard time finding things to eat too. They suffered quite a bit.

A: Do you want to tell me anything about the transportation in Sebastopol in those days?

MM: I remember seeing some (horses and buggies), yes. And the Model T Fords. In fact, we used to have a Model T. We had a MOdel A and a V-8. When the war broke out we did have a Model A.

A: And did you ever take the trolley?

MM: The streetcar into Santa Rosa? Yes, when I went to Sunday School, I used to take it from Sebastopol to Santa Rosa. That was before the war and before the temple was here. I went from Sebastopol to Santa Rosa for a dime in those days. It went right down the center of 4th Street in Santa Rosa and we got off, I think it was 4th and D Street.

A: Is there anything else that you can think of to share with me or the Historical Society about the Temple, the Japanese community or your own community that you would like to share?

MM: I think I am lucky to be in a place like Sebastopol. It really is a nice place. I really enjoy going to school and working and living here. The climate is good and and think we are really fortunate to be in such a nice location.

A: And your occupation. You worked at the post office?

MM: Yes, I worked at the post office 23 years, 19 years as a window clerk, so I met a lot of people. It will be 10 years this month since I retired.

A: You wanted to share the third service?

MM: The third service is called Ho-onko memorial service. That service is in celebration of the passing of the founder of our Jodo Shinshu sect who died about 800 years ago.

A: What was his name?

MM: His named was Shinran Shonin.

A: And can you describe the ceremony?

MM: The ceremony is mostly a memorial service. The minister gives a sermon and then you all go up and shoko at the end. It's just like a regular service, only it's called a memorial service for that person.

SECOND INTERVIEW WITH MINORU MATSUDA, May 6, 1992

MM: You asked me what does Buddhism teach. THe fundamental teaching of Jodo Shinshu is the four noble truths and the eight noble paths. The first four noble truths is that life is suffering and no. 2, the cause of suffering and no. 3, the cessation of suffering. And the 4th is the path to the ending of suffering. And the eight noble paths: No. 1, first is the right view, No. 2 is the right thought, No. 3 is the right speech. No. 4 is the right conduct, No. 5 is the right livelihood, No. 6 is the right effort, No. 7 is the right mindfulness, and No. 8 and the final one, is the right meditation. Those are the fundamental teachings of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism.

Arlene: I explained to your sensei that I've meditated in the past and he said he was very wary of American meditation. What's the difference between American and Buddhist meditation?

MM: American meditation, I think, you always ask God for something, like...

A: No, I'm not Christian. When I meditate, I try and just clear my mind of everything.

MM: Yes, that's right.

A: That's the right meditation?

MM: Yes in Buddhism we meditate.

A: Do you think on something?

MM: No, we appreciate what we get and what we have and we give thanks. We don't really ask for something. We just say thank you for everything that we have.

A: I see. So it's different from prayer, not meditation. And I wanted to ask you, do you know the date when the Enmanji Temple was built here? I know it was 1933 in Manchuria, but when was it reconstructed here?

MM: It was in 1933, it was in the Chicago World's Fair and after that it was brought over here so that was, I think, sometime in 1934 that the temple was built here in Sebastopol.

A: O.K. And during the internment period, in World War II, what happened to the temple. I mean, I'm not talking about when it was trashed, but did somebody take care of it during that time?

MM: Yes. Right next to the Temple there was a little gasoline station. It's not there anymore now. It's torn down but the people that stayed there kind of watched over it for us. A couple of times, I think, they (some people from

the area) tried to set fire to it and all that, and they were the ones that reported it (from the gasoline station).

A: Yes, I knew, I had read about that in the paper. It said the vandals torched the ceiling.

MM: Yes, they did.

A: Was that before you were sent away to the camps or after?

MM: No, that was after.

A: O.K. Because I also understand that some people from the Community Church came and formed a circle around the temple to protect it?

MM: I don't know about that. Yeah, it might have been, yes.

A: One of the people, did you ever hear of Jack Gerber, who is a teacher at Analy HIgh School? He was in a youth group at the time and he was supposedly one of the people who was in a circle to protect it.

A: I read in the articles from your sensei that there are temples all over the country and there are a lot in the Bay Area and I'm wondering do you have affiliations with them or any of the other people from other temples? Do you ever have meetings?

MM: Yes, we do. They have churches in this area called the Bay District Area and it involves our church and Alameda and Oakland and Southern Alameda County Church and San Francisco and San Mateo and I think that's about it.

A: So there are quite a few people?

MM: Yes, eight or nine churches.

A: Do you get together for meetings sometimes, maybe a couple of times a year?

MM: Yes, I think two or three times a year. And they have what they call a Bay DIstrict Conference once a year, usually in November.

A: You said that you don't have many people at this point who come to the temple. Are there any young people who come now? Is that a problem?

MM: Yes, there's quite a few young people. Not as many as we'd like to have, but there's quite a few now.

A: And your sensei also said there are Caucasians that go there too?

MM: Yes, I think we have three or four members.

A: And I got to go inside (the Temple) and I saw the altar and that there were three levels. Can you tell me about the three levels? Do you know what they are?

MM: No, I don't.

A: Oh, one's Buddha, I know that - Amida Buddha.

MM: Oh, you mean that picture in the back. The middle one is Amida Buddha, the right picture Shinran Shonin, and the picture on the left is Renyo Shonin.

A: And do you know what they represent?

MM: The one on the right, Shinran Shonin, he's the founder of our Jodo Shinshu sect. Buddhism has many sects and our sect is called Jodo Shinshu.

A: And the left?

MM: Then on the left, I think he's one of the teachers of Shinran Shonin.

A: And I know that Amida Buddha means "all light".

MM: Yes, "Infinite light".

A: And, if you don't mind, can I ask you some questions about your internment? Would you mind?

MM: No. Yes, it's all right.

A: You first went to Merced, you said. Can you describe what it was like there?

MM: Oh, the buildings were just tar-papered buildings with no ceiling on the top. They had partitions. I think one barrack had about five or six partitions.

A: For a family?

MM: Yes, one for each family. Some rooms were a little larger than others for bigger families. The small rooms were for single persons and all that. I think that camp had about four thousand people.

A: And you said that was a stable at first and had been converted?

MM: No, ours wasn't a stable. That was another camp in Tanforan. I think it's a race track in South San Francisco isn't it. They had apartments in a horse stable. But ours were all new buildings so we were pretty lucky that way.

A: How long were you there?

MM: We were there from May 15 or 16, 1942. We were evacuated and we stayed there until the first part of September. And from there we moved to Colorado.

A: You said you were evacuated about a week from now. Is there in the Japanese community, any commemoration of that at the temple?

MM: No, we don't commemorate that.

A: Well, it wouldn't be commemorative, but in a negative kind of way.

MM: No, we don't have any observance or anything like that.

A: When I spoke to your minister, it sounds like because of the Buddhist religion, it would follow that you wouldn't observe it at all. Is this right, do you think?

MM: Yes, I think so, yes.

A: Could I ask you , you were then relocated to the Amache Relocation Center near Lamar in the Southeast corner of Colorado? Did you have to go by train there?

MM: Oh, yes. I think it took us three days to get there. I think three days and two nights. It was on a steam train and we made a lot of stops because we had to let the main train get by a lot of times. And by the time we got there, well the train went through a lot of tunnels too, on the way to Colorado and some people had their windows open, and the black soot would come inside and when we got there we were pretty black from the soot.

A: What did you think on the way from one camp to another? What were people thinking? Were they afraid?

MM: No, I don't think they were afraid. It was a kind of novelty, I guess, in a way. But it was sad also, to be on a train like that and every once in a while the train would stop but the guards outside the train were watching us to see that nobody left the train.

A: What was the date you were transferred? Do you know?

MM: FRom Merced to Amache, I don't recall the date exactly. I know it was around the first part of September.

A: Then how long did you stay there?

MM: We stayed there until (around) 1945.

A: Three years?

MM: Yes, it would be three years, wouldn't it? Because the war ended in August 1945. Then people started coming back around about SEptember or October, 1945. I was going to school at that time so I came back about November, 1945.

A: You were in college?

MM: Yes, at the University of Colorado.

A: So, you were in the camp and you were allowed to go to college too?

MM: Oh, yes, well I think after about two years they let anybody out that they wanted to be. We were free to go out. In fact, they encouraged us to go out but a lot of people didn't know how it was outside. They would rather stay in with the family.

A: You did have radios though, right?

MM: Yes, they must have had at that time. I don't know. But we didn't have any radios.

A: So you didn't have news from outside?

MM: We had newspapers. BUt we never had radios though.

A: So, essentially, you could come and go as you wanted after a while, and you went to college.

MM: Yes. Well, after the second year, they wanted help in the farms and they asked for volunteers to go out to work in the sugar beets and all that and when the harvest was over, we came back to camp. But I think that after two to three years, well two years at least, because we stayed there three years altogether, so I think about the second year they encouraged us to go out and be on our own but, like I say, not too many were very eager to go out.

A: Sure, the war hadn't ended yet.

MM: Yes, they knew how it was outside. But a lot of people didn't go through this. They relocated to the East.

A: Yes, I knew that. In fact, to the South too.

MM: Yes.

A: So how were people treating you in Colorado then?

MM: They treated us pretty good. They treated us all right.

A: What was the camp like? What did it look like?

MM: Those buildings were more permanent there. They had ceilings on it and they were a little better insulated than the barracks in Merced. And we had a pot-bellied coal stove in each unit.

And some nights it got so cold we had to fill it all up and the darn stove would be red hot in the middle of the night.

A: But it sounds like the living conditions were a little bit better than in Merced?

MM: Yeah, they were better.

A: (Did you see the film Farewell to Manzinar?) That was of course in the desert, so it was probably different.

MM: Yes, our camp was in the desert, also.

A: Oh, it was?

MM: It was in the desert. There were lots of snakes and all that, but...

A: Could you do gardening there?

MM: Well, they had farms outside the camps so we could raise vegetables for our own use. We had farms out there and people went out to work out there... camp farms.

A: And I was curious because the last time we talked you seemed so grateful to be in california and yet if I had gone through what you went through I think I would have been very angry and resentful. Do you think that it was the teachings of Buddhism that have helped you get through those periods?

MM: Oh, I think in a way, yes. In fact, before the war, I didn't go to church very much, but the fact of the war, I started being more interested in the church.

A: And in a newspaper article in the Sebastopol Times, it said you were almost thankful to be behind barbed wire, "safer from anti-Asian sentiment that scorched Sebastopol and the rest of California". Do you know what some of the negative feelings were in Sebastopol?

A: I know that the temple was partly destroyed. It said also that there were night riders in the community up to 1944. Do you know anything about this?

MM: I think I just do recall the night riders. I think one of the families that came back at the beginning right after the war, I think, a group of people went up and told them they weren't welcome back to Sebastopol. I think they were some of the people that were right here in town. But I didn't have anything like that come over to our place.

A: So you only know of one incident?

MM: Yes, I know of only one.

A: They were people from downtown you think?

MM: I think so, yes. That's what I heard, anyway. I didn't see them myself.

A: So you never experienced any of this hostility?

MM: No, I didn't. In fact, the people that we knew, they were our neighbors, they were glad to see us come back. Maybe they didn't (feel glad to have us back) but they didn't show it to us. When we came back it was, we came back to a place on Gravenstein Highway. We used to own that place at Frank's corner. We stayed there, I think, two or three months and then we sold the place and moved up here, you see. There was no house here but there was a tank house and we lived in that temporarily.

A: you didn't have any problems?

MM: No, we didn't have any problems.

A: Do you have anything that you would like to add for the people in Sonoma County or in Sebastopol?

M: I'm glad to be back and I think everyone treated us as well as they could, considering the situation. I'm grateful to be living here. I think Sebastopol is a nice place to live and all the friends that I have, they've been good to me also. I consider myself very fortunate to be here.